

# The Role of Scenic Byways in Outdoor Recreation

*by Garry Young*

Recreation is an integral part of Idaho's scenic byways collection. Byways are designated because of one or more intrinsic qualities: archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic. Recreational qualities are mentioned frequently in the nomination submissions. Byways lead to recreational opportunities across the state—from moderate hiking, biking and bird watching, to extreme skiing, windsurfing and rock-climbing.

Byways bring Community pride and pull visitors from busy interstates, giving exposure to the lesser known areas of the state that offer unique off-the-beaten-path adventures. Byways are an essential component of tourism and can be looked upon as gateways or portals to many of the unique experiences that Idaho has to offer. Byways provide an attraction and reason/route for people to travel. They become part of the dreams about travel in Idaho. Scenic byways give people access to small towns, historic sites, parks, arts, scenery and new adventures. Scenic byways are an experience in



*City of Rocks National Reserve is one of the main features along the City of Rocks Back Country Byway.*



themselves. The byway designation validates the visitors' experience and many times will initiate an adventure.

In many Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plans more often than not Outdoor Recreation is identified as one of the intrinsic qualities of the byway. In the International Selkirk Loop Corridor Management Plan, for example, in the Tourist and Recreation Trends section it says the primary purpose to visit Pend Oreille Valley after family/friends was sightseeing 18% and outdoor recreation 12%. Under the Activities Section nearly one-quarter of all travelers to the region are coming for outdoor recreation pursuits. The primary trip purpose for long haul travelers was general sightseeing. Other important purposes were outdoors/wilderness activities. Top activities for non-resident visitors are sightseeing followed closely by hiking/backpacking.

In the process of developing a corridor management plan and discovering the trends mentioned earlier, there seems to be a very close tie between the two activities of sightseeing and outdoor recreation. Tourists that seek scenic byways would expect to find recreation as the statistics indicate. The International Selkirk Loop, for example, offers a great concentration of recreational activities, especially when bordering federal and state public lands with lakes and rivers along almost every mile, with access to hundreds of miles of hiking trails into the Selkirk Mountains, wildlife refuges, ski resorts, golf courses, mountain biking trails all in stunning scenery.

According to Lynn Moss, director of parks and recreation for the City of Lewiston, tourists and recreationists are similar animals. Recreationists are just tourists who don't have to travel so far to enjoy themselves—i.e., are residents within the immediate or surrounding area. Scenic byways have always been presumed to benefit tourists. Promotion of scenic byways helps locals (as well as those further away—the tourists) understand the opportunities for interacting with the natural environment.

A function of scenic byways is to draw travelers off the interstate highway system. They are the corridors to access outdoor recreation. The visitor is no longer an observer from afar... rather a participant. When marketing a byway, travelers are informed about recreational opportunities, influencing tourism.

In Southeast Idaho, Region V, there are two designated byways, the Oregon Trail-Bear Lake Scenic Byway and the Pioneer Historic Byway. Both of these byways are the primary state and federal highways and provide access the region's outdoor recreation opportunities. The byways offer immediate access to the following federal and state natural resource management agencies' lands, and also to outdoor recreational opportunities at reservoirs, and parks operated by power companies, irrigation districts, counties, and cities:

- Caribou National Forest
- Bureau of Land Management Administered Lands
- Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
- Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge
- Bear Lake State Park
- Thousands of acres of State of Idaho Endowment Lands
- Four Pacific Corps reservoirs along the Bear River
- Blackfoot Reservoir
- The Bear River
- Blackfoot River
- Numerous County Parks and boat launch facilities

The following outdoor recreational activities are available for public use on all or most of these lands:

- Hunting
- Fishing
- Camping of all kinds
- ATV, motorcycle trail systems
- Hiking
- Mountain Biking
- Berry Picking and other gathering activities
- Gold Panning
- Wildlife Viewing
- Snowmobiling
- Cross Country Skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Bird Watching
- Horseback Riding
- Canoeing and rafting
- Natural Hot Spring "Soaking"
- Boating and Water Skiing
- Swimming
- Spelunking
- Rock Climbing

The scenic byway system in full development will lead travelers to all and more of these outdoor recreational opportunities. The byways offer a means for the public to access these outdoor experiences while concurrently entering an area where the local byway organizations can offer historic, scenic, and cultural information along with information on how to access these recreational opportunities. Providing these services should be an integral part of any organized byway planning and lead to success of the byway system to become a booster of the regional and local economic growth.

Scenic byways are synonymous with recreational opportunities in Idaho, where highways are found in the natural corridors between mountains and most frequently, along the edges of water. The most attractive of these highways have become our scenic byways and each one leads to a wide array of recreation – in all four seasons. Many of these byways are the vehicular corridors leading to adjoining, neighboring, or nearby public lands. When people seek a place to recreate in Idaho, most are heading to the water or to the mountains. Where better to find them than from a scenic byway?

These same byways provide access to summer's plethora of water sports ranging from fishing streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes small or large; canoeing and kayaking flat water, slow water, or white water; boating to ski and tube or camp and enjoy scenery. Mountain bike, motorbike, ATV, and hiking trails are woven into much of our National Forest lands, which in turn comprise a significant piece of our visual landscape across all of northern Idaho. Berry picking, spring and fall mushroom gathering, bird watching, and visually enjoying the seasonal colors and flora are just some of the more passive forms of outdoor recreation readily available from every scenic byway and their corridors. Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, or snowmobiles provide numerous occasions of winter recreation, entertainment, and stimulation. One recreational pursuit is the simple enjoyment of driving along the scenic beauty unfolding before you on these byways.

Idaho residents most likely recreate at an equal or greater rate than visitors to this state. Each Idaho byway offers its own menu of recreational opportunities. More than anything else when considering the connections between scenic byways and recreational opportunities, it is nearly impossible to find one and not have included the other.

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